
Best Practice Fact Sheet – Addressing Major Barriers

UTAH'S TRANSITIONAL JOBS PROGRAM

Program

Description: Utah uses a performance-based contract with mental health agencies to provide unsubsidized jobs, with the agency paying the wages the TANF agency providing work supports.

Target Population: Transitional Jobs for TANF clients with diagnosed mental health disabilities (e.g., major depression, generalized anxiety, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder)

Goals: Find and keep work or transition to SSI

Caseload Data: Transitional Jobs program serves up to 60 clients of which up to 20 may be on TANF. Staff are highly skilled and carry caseloads of no more than 30 clients.

Cost: The Utah TANF agency contracts with local mental health agencies to provide open-ended unsubsidized jobs at county mental health centers. The mental health centers provide the wages and the TANF agency covers the cost of supervision and for other logistical worksite supports.

Evidence: Mathematica briefs – descriptive output studies

Assessment: A licensed clinical therapist from the TANF office or a Community Health Center therapist diagnoses the client's condition and creates a treatment plan.

Description of Services:

The TANF agency contracts with mental health agencies to provide open-ended unsubsidized transitional jobs at county mental health centers.

- The client must follow his or her treatment plan which includes regularly scheduled visits and learning coping skills to balance their mental health condition and work and helps when the stress of work aggravates their mental health condition.
- The mental health agency hires recipients as regular employees and pays them \$6.50 per hour to perform janitorial, food service, landscaping, painting and clerical jobs.
- Work hours are based on clients' mental health status and typically start with a small number of hours which gradually increase as the person's capacity to work improves.
- Wages are not subsidized by the TANF agency, but TANF does cover the cost of supervision and for other logistical worksite supports (child care, transportation and work-related expenses like clothing) and incentives (50-cent bonus for each hour worked during the pay period if they showed up on time every day and performed their work well).
- Combines work with mental health treatment as a condition of eligibility for the job.
- Provides the client with a personal advisor to teach them basic problem-solving and life skills to help them organize, prioritize and manage their lives. Some of the skill-building activities include arranging back-up transportation and child care, determining financial priorities and learning effective ways to communicate and manage their anger.
- The mental health agency collaborates and coordinates services with the TANF agency.
- Provides job search and job placement in competitive jobs in the community (but the client can return if they lose or quit that job).

Eligibility:

Transitional jobs are limited to those with significant mental health disabilities.

Findings:

- Of 17 clients with significant mental health disabilities who had entered the transitional jobs program at the time of Mathematica's study, results varied over time. Accomplishments included nine who worked four 30-hour weeks, five who moved to regular employment, seven who were promoted (within the mental health center or through outside employment), eight who increased their hourly wage and eight who exited TANF due to employment. By the end of the study period, however, nine had moved out of state, continued to have difficulties and/or were sanctioned.

Implications for Policymakers and Program Developers to Consider:

Key program elements of the transitional jobs program include:

- (1) Specialized and comprehensive assessment that allows the therapist to tailor the type of work placement, hours, accommodations and intensity of work to the client's needs.
- (2) Initial and ongoing treatment stabilizes the client's condition before they start work; monitor's their condition over time and allows the therapist to teach the client how to cope with work stressors.
- (3) Individualized employment placements that match the client's skills and abilities with appropriate accommodations such as reorganizing and reallocating job tasks, altering workspace and providing adaptive equipment.
- (5) Intensive personal and work supports employ personal advisors to act as resource locators, teachers, advocates and motivators.
- (6) Progressive and flexible steps toward employment may be a slow process that takes between six months and a year for most and far longer for some.

Resources:

Utah's case management and Transitional Jobs program was recommended by Dr. Donna Pavetti of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Information was also provided by Helen Thatcher, 801-526-4370 and Theresa Wheatley 801-889-8675.

["Creating Work Opportunities"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (February 2008)

["Assisting TANF Recipients Living with Disabilities to Obtain and Maintain Employment: Final Report"](#) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (February 2008)